



WHO THE FUCK IS *WE* ?

SOME MALADJUSTED ANARCHISTS

Typset in **BERLINSANS**, Alegreya, and Adobe Caslon Pro,

Cover: Black and white abstract illustration of gears of various sizes turning in a machine.

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No need to couch it in the corny faux-social justice™ language of ‘historic’ solidarity and unity, **we get it**: what you really want is to get back to your oh-so-important teaching and research. To return to the professional career path you were promised. Or ‘earned.’ You see the strike as a way to make that journey just a little bit more equitable. The overwhelming (astroturfed?) enthusiasm around the (as of the writing of this piece) signed Tentative Agreement says it all. While you might be righteously outraged by the indignities of the ‘neoliberal university’--especially in regards to wages--and perhaps share a low-level commitment to disability and racial justice, **you can just admit it**. You **want** to return to work. The only question is: on what terms?

“The loud ‘or bust’ folks need to stop shaming their coworkers. We want to work. We love the deal.”

Whether you’re an ethnic studies ‘scholar-activist’ teaching about late ‘60s militancy and anticolonial movements, an agricultural scientist working on the next GMO seed to flood the South Asian market, or an economist doing...whatever the fuck it is that economists do, chances are you see the teaching and/or research labor that you do as somehow more special and important than most other peoples’ jobs. **Not just your work, but your vocation, your career**. And of course this idealization of our positions as scholars and educators comes in an infinite variety of flavors indelibly riven with the fissures of race, class, legal status, and gender. There are real material and ideological differences in these positions that undergird their various responses to the strike. For the business unionists and their cronies, this strike is a last resort, a temporary, pragmatic exercise of symbolic power to bring the UC to the table to negotiate a new contract and settle contentions as quickly as possible (as evidenced by their current push for a TA ratification vote ASAP). For the ‘militant’ rank-and-file, the strike is an opportunity to ‘democratize’ the union, the workplace, and transform relations of power in the University, perhaps with the long-term goal of eroding the power of the bosses and building the power of the ‘working class’, piece by piece, article by article. **Either way, ultimately, our attention is turned to the inevitability of returning to work, under a set of more or less conciliatory conditions**. Any horizons beyond the world of work remain but a dream, lost within a labor movement thoroughly disciplined by Capital.

But it bears repeating--as our friends titled an essay back in November--**there is nothing special about what we do**. This point is more than just pithy polemics. It gets at the heart of a disjuncture; that gap between who we think we are (and the importance of what we do) and the roles we actually play in the reproduction of racialized class society. That despite the fact that some of us might ‘love’ what we do, or see ourselves as ‘the good guys’ dedicated to a stately vocation of pedagogy and knowledge production, **at the end of the day what we do is just another job like any other**. And the unspoken truth is that going to work fucking sucks, even if you ‘like your job’ or

whatever you tell yourself to get through the day. So why all the moralizing about wanting to go back?

“WHAT ABOUT SRS WHO HAVE STRUCK WORK HARMING THEIR OWN PROGRESS”²

The latent careerism in our movement has even expressed itself recently as scab apologia; as some argue, even the prospect of shunning or discouraging various forms of ‘scabbing’ is a step too far. After all, as one of our esteemed ‘comrades’ urged recently on Twitter, grad school is “a time to develop your capacity in your career as much as it is a job to produce for your employer.” They argue that because of the threats of professional retaliation and the potential impacts of neglecting ‘career defining’ research and connections, we should not shun our ‘comrades’ who cross the picket line--which is becoming more and more of a reality as the strike marches on. God forbid we invite ‘hostility’ into ‘our communities.’(Only a fucking grad student would be so corny as to talk about their programs/workplaces as ‘communities’).

“I cannot believe the nerve of some people denying just how life changing this would be.”³

We all do what we have to do to put food on the table, pay our rent, and provide for our loved ones. And sure, we do find some value in having a space to discuss colonialism, capitalism, race, etc. But it takes a special kind of tunnel vision to assume that the University is the ideal or only place to do that. In a climate of austerity and budget cuts, especially for ‘critical’ fields like ethnic studies, feminist studies, etc., it’s understandable why ostensibly ‘radical-minded’ folks would seek to retreat back into the tenuous ‘safety’ of their siloed departments. When the production of theory, curricula, and journal articles stands in for actually acting on the irreconcilable demands of the movements that birthed said departments, there’s a certain level of recuperation at work. And that recuperation is lucrative. It makes careers, a rare thing in an increasingly austere and hostile University. But we know where that road leads.

“People in my department WANT to return to work! Many departments already HAVE returned to work”⁴

We’re not saying that you shouldn’t enjoy sharing knowledge and learning about the things you are passionate about. What we’re saying is that you’ve got to stop confusing your fucking research interests, career goals, and class aspirations with something deeper. To stop operating with the pretension that revolutionary struggle can be waged merely through ‘education’ and ‘research’. Or that intellectual pursuits are somehow insu-

2 Ibid.

3 Verbal comment, UAW SRU/2865 Bargaining Caucus, 12/15/22

4 Ibid.

lated from all the bullshit that keeps this world turning over. Even if you think the topics you discuss in class are just *so* ‘transformative,’ even if it pains you not to be in the classroom ‘speaking truth to power’ and ‘raising consciousness,’ it bears repeating the late Gustavo Esteva’s reminder that pedagogy--even in its ‘critical’ forms--still functions as a mediator of an oppressive system that reproduces domination and hierarchy.⁵ ***This fetishization of being a ‘radical’ teacher engaged in ‘revolutionary’ education serves to exceptionalize the classroom as the premier site of knowledge production, foreclosing the innumerable vernacular modes of reflection, study, struggle, and action within, beyond, and against these ‘ivory tower’ institutions of extraction and exploitation.*** The picket line, barricade, occupation, riot and other (albeit temporary) spaces of insurrectionary *comoción*, are crucial sites of knowledge production, relationship building, and learning. Without reckoning with this, we are left with a particularly annoying form of self-indulgent careerism billing itself as ‘liberatory’ and ‘student centered.’

“Don’t let labor relations mess up this deal we need it NOW”*

So what happens when the strike inevitably ends, and we’ve gained a new contract? We go back to the classroom. Or the lab. Or the ‘field.’ Slogging away again in our programs, content with our marginally better pay and our positions secured within the ‘safety’ of the University’s warm embrace. And then, ideally on to the greener pastures of overly paid tenure-track or nonacademic ‘industry’ employment. The temporary “poverty” of graduate student life is just a blip on the journey of an otherwise sure to be successful or lucrative career. That or a lifetime of precarious adjuncting and underemployment. We’re not here to tell you to not want that--a stable job with wages and benefits goes a long way in the fucked up world we live in. But if that’s our horizon, all “we” want, then “we” might not be in the same fight, and we have to stop trying to convince ourselves otherwise.

This isn’t some holier than thou wagging of the fingers--at the end of the day all we still work and study here right? We always have the option of leaving. But what an anti-work orientation⁷ offers those of us struggling against the University is illuminating the uncomfortable truths about the complete unexceptionality of the ‘work’ we actually do here. If what we do isn’t special or different, but rather the same alienated life activity as any other form of labor, then why are so many of us so loyal to our ‘vocations?’ It urges us to reject not just wages or conditions of the workplaces, but the very category of ‘work’ itself, the blariness of the life it creates, which is inseparable from the relations and reproduction of the racial regime of capital.

5 Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva, “Escaping Education: Living as Learning within Grassroots Cultures” *British Journal of Educational Technology* 39, no. 4 (2008): pp. 760-760,

6 Zoom Chat, UAW SRU/2865 Bargaining Caucus

7 See “But We Have to Do it Real Slow” by Noche

We do not want to return to work. Not because we hate this job in particular, but because we hate all jobs. Not because we think our jobs as graduate students are exceptionally bad, but because we know they are not exceptional at all, that they are just another form of exploitation like any other. We do not want to return to work because we want the end of the world of work and all its miseries, for ourselves and everyone else. ***Anything less, any potential contract IS already the concession, no matter the terms.*** So even after this strike ends, don't just teach your students, ***commiserate, plot, study.*** Don't just play your assigned role in your PI's research, ***slack off, expropriate, scheme.*** Or don't, just continue your assigned role as a productive and obedient scholar, educator, or researcher. But don't pretend your work is more important than the strike itself.

You don't have to identify with the work that you do. You really don't.

It's a road to nowhere. You're just fucking playing yourself.

(but maybe that's all most of us want anyway)

